



Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments

Appropriations Hearing

HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023

Department of Housing

Wednesday, February 16th, 2022

Helen McAlinden

President and CEO

Homes with Hope

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Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. Top of the evening to you. I can't be here with you tonight because I am back visiting my family in Ireland but it is so important to me to submit this testimony prior to my visit. I hope I can get internet and join also to testify. Thank you for hearing my testimony today on House Bill 5037 (AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023). Thank you also for your loyalty and dedication to the Appropriations Committee and doing such a great job to support the most vulnerable we serve in CT. I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Helen McAlinden and I work in Westport and am a resident of Fairfield CT.

I am an active member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut, a member of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness and a member and the Co-Chair of Opening Doors Fairfield County Advocacy Committee. I, alongside many other partners in the state, know that safe, affordable, and permanent housing is the only solution to homelessness. When our state's residents have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for permanent housing for all of Connecticut's residents was made even more important.

I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Housing (DOH): Without the Department of Housing's support since COVID began so many people that were moved from homeless shelters throughout CT would probably have died but for the funding support of DOH.

As a direct result of the pandemic, our offices continue to receive an unprecedented number of calls from individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity. As of 2/10/22, Fairfield County has 123 families and 327 individuals on the active housing list in Fairfield County. These individuals and families are currently staying in emergency shelters, temporary hotels, and unsheltered settings. This population is also at greater risk of exposure to Omicron or other COVID variants.

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I urge you to support the affordable housing crisis by committing to create more units to address the immediate crisis posed by COVID and the lack of housing availability.

Currently, Homes with Hope's Gillespie Centers Homeless Emergency Shelter, and all other Shelters in CT, have many residents with limited income working a few jobs and still unable to move to housing due to the lack and cost of affordable housing.

To put things in perspective, currently, in Westport, a studio's fair market rent cost is \$1,520, one-bedroom is \$1,855, two-bedroom is \$2,230, and three-bedroom is \$2,757. Not only is this outrageous, but even at those outlandish prices, there is no affordable housing available. When stock becomes available, apartments are quickly renting above the fair market rental amount. Think of this: the hourly wage for a full-time worker to afford a studio apartment is \$31.66, a one-bedroom is \$38.66, a two-bedroom is \$46.46, and a three-bedroom is \$57.44. Connecticut's minimum wage is \$13.00 per hour. Even with two minimum wage jobs, most can't afford to live here in Fairfield County, much less Westport, where many of their jobs and natural supports exist. Despite discussing this on a local level this is in fact true for the whole system throughout CT.

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I support the preservation of DOH's following FY23 allocations:

- I also support providing an additional \$13.34 million in FY 23 (\$8.08 million at DOH and \$5.26 million at DMHAS) to provide homeless and housing service organizations [funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers](#), increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology via:
 - \$7.47 million increase in DOH Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$169K increase in DOH Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$436K increase in DOH Homeless Youth line
- I support an additional \$2.3 million in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line to provide critical staff infrastructure support to [Coordinated Access Networks \(CANs\) and 2-1-1](#). CANs provide streamlined access to the homeless services system at the regional level. 2-1-1 serves as the statewide single point of entry to CANs.
- I support an increase to DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line by at least \$20 million in FY23 to expand the [Rental Assistance Program \(RAP\)](#), including \$2 million to provide rental assistance to 200 scattered-site supportive housing units for highly vulnerable individuals and families.

Additionally, I support the governor's proposed allocation of \$50 million in American Rescue Plan recovery funds to support the creation of 350 additional

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housing units affordable to households with incomes between 30% and 50% of area median income.

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Homelessness is solvable. Connecticut can make homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time experience by investing in what works: housing, supportive services, and the people and infrastructure that support our most vulnerable residents.

The cost of renting a home in Fairfield County has increased exponentially. Many longtime residents of Westport found the houses they rented were sold or faced steep rent increases. Residents call Homes with Hope, Westport Housing Authority or Westport Social Services often looking for help to stay in Westport. **If you spoke to them, you would hear their heartbreaking stories. Many have lived here their whole lives. Others have children in our school system and are desperate to stay. Others facing a divorce or death of a spouse feel keenly the need to stay living amongst their friends in their longtime community but can no longer afford to do so.**

Same is true for the front line staff that work hard every day supporting our most vulnerable and they themselves are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Currently, working at our shelter we have a wonderful employee who is a person that has lived homeless experience. Today, as an employee, and colleague, in the field where he once was a client I see how he and other front line employees struggle to live in Fairfield County. I hear the stories daily from staff and clients that they can't afford the apartments that may come available because without any government support they would need to earn almost \$38.00 to afford a basic unit. Increasing our government contracts would allow for increased wages which in return will allow our hardworking staff to earn a complete wage and not end up homeless themselves. Even working two jobs our clients and front line workers can't afford to live here and will end up costing more if they fall back into the costly homeless system.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony from afar, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions as we look to shape Connecticut's future beyond the pandemic— it is with your support that we can help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,

Helen McAlinden
President and CEO
Homes with Hope
www.hwhct.org